

The Mystery of The Yellow Room

By GASTON LEROUX

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CHAPTER III.

"A Man Has Passed Like a Shadow Through the Blinds."

HALF an hour later Rouletabille and I were on the platform of the Orleans station, awaiting the departure of the train which was to take us to Epinal-sur-Orge.

On the platform we found M. de Marquet and his registrar, who represented the judicial court of Corbeil. M. de Marquet had spent the night in Paris, assisting in the final rehearsal at the Scala of a little play of which he was the unknown author, signing himself simply "Castigat Ridendo."

M. Marquet was beginning to be a "noble old gentleman." Generally he was extremely polite and full of gay humor and in all his life had had but one passion—that of dramatic art.

Because of the mystery which shrouded it the case of the yellow room was certain to fascinate so theatrical a mind.

At the moment of meeting him I heard M. de Marquet say to the registrar with a sigh:

"I hope, my dear M. Maleine, this builder with his pickax will not destroy so fine a mystery."

"Have no fear," replied M. Maleine. "His pickax may demolish the pavilion perhaps, but it will leave our case intact. I have sounded the walls and examined the ceiling and floor, and I know all about it. I am not to be deceived."

Having thus reassured his chief, M. Maleine, with a discreet movement of the head, drew M. de Marquet's attention to us. The face of that gentleman clouded, and as he saw Rouletabille approaching, hat in hand, he sprang into one of the empty carriages, saying half aloud to his registrar as he did so, "Above all, no journalists!"

M. Maleine replied in the same tone, "I understand," and then tried to prevent Rouletabille from entering the same compartment with the examining magistrate.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, this compartment is reserved."

"I am a journalist, monsieur, engaged on the Epique," said my young friend, with a great show of gesture and politeness, "and I have a word or two to say to M. de Marquet."

"Monsieur is very much engaged with the inquiry he has in hand," "Ah! His inquiry, pray believe me, is absolutely a matter of indifference to me. I am no scavenger of odds and ends," he went on, with infinite contempt in his lower lip; "I am a theatrical reporter, and this evening I shall have to give a little account of the play at the Scala."

"Get in, sir, please," said the registrar.

Rouletabille was already in the compartment. I went in after him and seated myself by his side. The registrar followed and closed the carriage door.

M. de Marquet looked at him.

"Ah, sir," Rouletabille began, "you must not be angry with M. Maleine. It is not with M. de Marquet that I desire to have the honor of speaking, but with M. 'Castigat Ridendo.' Permit me to congratulate you—personally, as well as the writer for the Epique." And Rouletabille, having first introduced me, introduced himself.

M. de Marquet, with a nervous gesture, caressed his beard into a point.

"The work of the dramatic author may interfere," he said, after a slight hesitation, "with that of the magistrate, especially in a province where one's labors are little more than routine."

"Oh, you may rely on my discretion!" cried Rouletabille.

The train was in motion.

"We have started!" said the examining magistrate, surprised at seeing us still in the carriage.

"Yes, monsieur, truth has started," said Rouletabille, smiling amiably, "on its way to the Chateau du Glandier. A fine case, M. de Marquet, a fine case!"

"An obscure, incredible, unfathomable, inexplicable affair, and there is only one thing I fear, M. Rouletabille, that the journalists will be trying to explain it."

My friend felt this a rap on his knuckles.

"Yes," he said simply, "that is to be feared. They meddle in everything. As for my interest, monsieur, I only referred to it by mere chance—the mere chance of finding myself in the same train with you and in the same compartment of the same carriage."

"Where are you going, then?" asked M. de Marquet.

"To the Chateau du Glandier," replied Rouletabille, without turning.

"You'll not get in, M. Rouletabille!" "Will you prevent me?" said my friend, already prepared to fight.

"Not I! I like the press and journalists too well to be in any way disagreeable to them, but M. Stangerson has given orders for his door to be closed against everybody, and it is well guarded. Not a journalist was able to pass through the gate of the Glandier yesterday."

M. de Marquet compressed his lips

and seemed ready to relapse into obstinate silence. He only relaxed a little when Rouletabille no longer left him in ignorance of the fact that we were going to the Glandier for the purpose of shaking hands with an "old and intimate friend," M. Robert Darzac—a man whom Rouletabille had perhaps seen once in his life.

"Poor Robert!" continued the young reporter, "this dreadful affair may be his death—he is so deeply in love with Mlle. Stangerson. It is to be hoped that Mlle. Stangerson's life will be saved."

"Let us hope so. Her father told me yesterday that if she does not recover it will not be long before he joins her in the grave. What an incalculable loss to science his death would be!"

"The wound on her temple is serious, is it not?"

"Evidently, but by a wonderful chance it has not proved mortal. The blow was given with great force."

"Then it was not with the revolver she was wounded," said Rouletabille, glancing at me in triumph.

M. de Marquet appeared greatly embarrassed.

"I didn't say anything, I don't want to say anything, I will not say anything," he said. And he turned toward his registrar as if he no longer knew us.

But Rouletabille was not to be so easily shaken off. He moved nearer to the examining magistrate and, drawing a copy of the *Matin* from his pocket, he showed it to him and said:

"There is one thing, monsieur, which I may inquire of you without committing an indiscretion. You have, of course, seen the account given in the *Matin*? It is absurd, is it not?"

"Not in the slightest, monsieur."

"What! The yellow room has but one barred window, the bars of which have not been moved, and only one door, which had to be broken open, and the assassin was not found?"

"That's so, monsieur; that's so. That's how the matter stands."

Rouletabille said no more, but plunged into thought. A quarter of an hour thus passed.

Coming back to himself again, he said, addressing the magistrate:

"How did Mlle. Stangerson wear her hair on that evening?"

"I don't know," replied M. de Marquet.

"That's a very important point," said Rouletabille. "Her hair was done up in bands, wasn't it? I feel sure that on that evening, the evening of the crime, she had her hair arranged in bands."

"Then you are mistaken, M. Rouletabille," replied the magistrate. "Mlle. Stangerson that evening had her hair drawn up in a knot on the top of her head, her usual way of arranging it, her forehead completely uncovered. I can assure you, for we have carefully examined the wound. There was no blood on the hair, and the arrangement of it has not been disturbed since the crime was committed."

"You are sure? You are sure that on the night of the crime she had not her hair in bands?"

"Quite sure," the magistrate continued, smiling, "because I remember the doctor saying to me while he was examining the wound: 'It is a great pity Mlle. Stangerson was in the habit of drawing her hair back from her forehead. If she had worn it in bands the blow she received on the temple would have been weakened.' It seems strange to me that you should attach so much importance to this point."

"Oh, if she had not her hair in bands I give it up," said Rouletabille, with a despairing gesture.

"And was the wound on her temple a bad one?" he asked presently.

"Terrible."

"With what weapon was it made?"

"That is a secret of the investigation."

"Have you found the weapon—what ever it was?"

The magistrate did not answer.

"And the wound in the throat?"

Here the examining magistrate readily confirmed the decision of the doctor that, if the murderer had pressed her throat a few seconds longer, Mlle. Stangerson would have died of strangulation.

"The affair as reported in the *Matin*," said Rouletabille eagerly, "seems to me more and more inexplicable. Can you tell me, monsieur, how many openings there are in the pavilion? I mean doors and windows."

"There are five," replied Monsieur de Marquet, after having coughed once or twice, but no longer resisting the desire he felt to talk of the whole of the incredible mystery of the affair he was investigating. "There are five, of which the door of the vestibule is the only entrance to the pavilion—a door always automatically closed, which cannot be opened, either from the outside or inside, except with the two special keys which are never out of the possession of either Daddy Jacques or M. Stangerson. Mlle. Stangerson had no need for me, since Daddy Jacques lodged in the pavilion and because, during the daytime, she never left her father. When they, all four, rushed into the yellow room, after breaking open the door of the laboratory, the door in the vestibule re-

mained closed as usual and of the two keys for opening it Daddy Jacques had one in his pocket and M. Stangerson the other. As to the windows of the pavilion, there are four, the one window of the yellow room and those of the laboratory looking out on to the country, the window in the vestibule looking into the park."

"It is by that window that he escaped from the pavilion!" cried Rouletabille.

"How do you know that?"

"How? Oh, the thing is simple enough! As soon as he found he could not escape by the door of the pavilion his only way out was by the window in the vestibule, unless he could pass through a grated window. The window of the yellow room is secured by iron bars, because it looks out upon the open country; the two windows of the laboratory have to be protected in like manner for the same reason. As the murderer got away I conceive that he found a window that was not barred—that of the vestibule, which opens on to the park—that is to say, into the interior of the estate. There's not much magic in all that."

"Yes," said M. de Marquet, "but what you have not guessed is that this single window in the vestibule, though it has no iron bars, has solid iron blinds. Now, these iron blinds have remained fastened by their iron latch, and yet we have proof that the murderer made his escape from the pavilion by that window! Traces of blood on the inside wall and on the blinds as well as on the floor, and footmarks, of which I have taken the measurements, attest the fact that the murderer made his escape that way. But, then, how did he do it, seeing that the blinds remained fastened on the inside? He passed through them like a shadow. But what is more bewildering than all, is that it is impossible to form any idea as to how the murderer got out of the yellow room or how he got across the laboratory to reach the vestibule!"

"Could that window have been closed and refastened after the flight of the assassin?" asked Rouletabille.

"That is what occurred to me for a moment, but it would imply an accomplice or accomplices, and I don't see—"

After a short silence he added:

"Ah, if Mlle. Stangerson were only well enough today to allow of her being questioned!"

Rouletabille, following up his thought, asked:

"And the attic? There must be some opening to that?"

"Yes; there is a window or, rather, skylight in it, which, as it looks out toward the country, M. Stangerson has had barred, like the rest of the windows. These bars, as in the other windows, have remained intact, and the blinds, which naturally open inward, have not been unfastened. For the rest, we have not discovered anything to lead us to suspect that the murderer had passed through the attic."

"It seems clear to you, then, monsieur, that the murderer escaped—no body knows how—by the window in the vestibule?"

"Everything goes to prove it."

"I think so, too," confessed Rouletabille gravely.

After a brief silence he continued:

"If you have not found any traces of the murderer in the attic, such as the dirty footmarks similar to those on the floor of the yellow room, you must come to the conclusion that it was not he who stole Daddy Jacques' revolver."

"There are no footmarks in the attic other than those of Daddy Jacques himself," said the magistrate with a significant turn of his head. Then, after an apparent decision, he added, "Daddy Jacques was with M. Stangerson in the laboratory, and it was lucky for him he was."

"Then what part did his revolver play in the tragedy? It seems very clear that this weapon did less harm to Mlle. Stangerson than it did to the murderer."

The magistrate made no reply to this question, which doubtless embarrassed him. "M. Stangerson," he said, "tells us that the two bullets have been found in the yellow room, one embedded in the wall stained with the impression of a red hand—a man's large hand—and the other in the ceiling."

"Oh, oh, in the ceiling!" muttered Rouletabille. "In the ceiling! That's very curious! In the ceiling!"

He puffed awhile in silence at his pipe, enveloping himself in the smoke. When we reached Epinal-sur-Orge I had to tap him on the shoulder to arouse him from his dream and come out on to the platform of the station.

There the magistrate and his registrar bowed to us and, by rapidly getting into a cab that was awaiting them, made us understand that they had seen enough of us.

"How long will it take to walk to the Chateau du Glandier?" Rouletabille asked one of the railway porters.

"An hour and a half or an hour and three-quarters—easy walking," the man replied.

Rouletabille looked up at the sky and, no doubt finding its appearance satisfactory, took my arm and said:

"Come on! I need a walk. It was a

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RESULT OF MILL MEETING.

From Flora Journal.
At the meeting of the stockholders
of the Flora Milling Co., Monday af-
ternoon, the following officers were
elected: F. S. Johnson, president;
L. Austin, manager; W. H. Baker,
treasurer; T. M. Gilmore, secretary;

J. Doran, director. The Milling com-
pany so far in erecting the mill have
been to the expense of \$9000. The
building is number one and the ma-
chinery is as good as new. The ar-
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better. Everything is lovely and in
a week will be making flour.

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bit of luck our falling in with that
examining magistrate and his registrar,
eh? What did I tell you about that
revolver?"

His head was bent down, he had his
hands in his pockets, and he was
whistling. After awhile I heard him
murmur:

"Poor woman!"

"Is it Mlle. Stangerson you are pity-
ing?"

"Yes. She's a noble woman and
worthy of being pitied—a woman of
a great, a very great, character. I
imagine—I imagine."

"You know her, then?"

"Not at all. I have never seen her
but once."

"Why, then, do you say that she is a
woman of great character?"

"Because she bravely faced the mur-
derer, because she courageously de-
fended herself, and, above all, because
of the bullet in the ceiling."

CHAPTER IV.

"In the Bosom of Wild Nature."

THE Chateau du Glandier is one
of the oldest chateaux in the
Ile de France, where so many
building remains of the feudal
period are still standing. Built origi-
nally in the heart of the forest in the
reign of Philip le Bel, it now could be
seen a few hundred yards from the
road leading from the village of Sainte-
Genevieve to Monthery. A mass of
inhomogeneous structures, it is domi-
nated by a donjon.

It was in this place, seemingly be-
longing entirely to the past, that Pro-
fessor Stangerson and his daughter in-
stalled themselves to lay the founda-
tions for the science of the future.

When M. Stangerson bought the es-
tate, fifteen years before the tragedy
with which we are engaged occurred,
the Chateau du Glandier had for a
long time been unoccupied. Another
old chateau in the neighborhood, built
in the fourteenth century by Jean de
Belmont, was also abandoned, so that
that part of the country was very lit-
tle inhabited. Some small houses on
the side of the road leading to Corbeil,
an inn, called the Auberge du Don-
jon, which offered passing hospitality
to wagoners—these were about all to
represent civilization in this out of the
way part of the country, but a few
leagues from the capital.

But this deserted condition of the
place had been the determining reason
for the choice made by M. Stangerson
and his daughter. M. Stangerson was
already celebrated. He had returned
from America, where his works had
made a great stir. The book which he
had published at Philadelphia, on the
"Dissociation of Matter by Electric
Action," had aroused opposition
throughout the whole scientific world.
M. Stangerson was a Frenchman, but
of American origin. Important mat-
ters relating to a legacy had kept him
for several years in the United States,
where he had continued the work be-
gun by him in France, whither he had
returned in possession of a large for-
tune.

Mlle. Stangerson was at the time
when her father returned from Amer-
ica and bought the Glandier estate
twenty years of age. She was ex-
ceedingly pretty, having at once the
Parisian grace of her mother, who had
died in giving her birth, and all the
splendor, all the riches of the young
American blood of her parental grand-
father, William Stangerson. A citizen
of Philadelphia, William Stangerson
had been obliged to become natural-
ized in obedience to family exigencies
at the time of his marriage with a
French lady.

Twenty years of age, a charming
blond, with blue eyes, milk white
complexion and radiant with divine
health, Mathilde Stangerson was one
of the most beautiful marriageable
girls in either the old or the new world.
It was her father's duty, in spite of
the inevitable pain which a separation
from her would cause him, to think of
her marriage, and he was fully pre-
pared for it. Nevertheless he buried
himself and his child at the Glandier
at the moment when his friends were
expecting him to bring her out into so-
ciety.

Questioned by her friends, the young
girl replied calmly, "Where could we
work better than in this solitude?"
For Mlle. Stangerson had already be-
gun to collaborate with her father in
his work. It could not at the time be
imagined that her passion for science
would lead her so far as to refuse all
the suitors who presented themselves
to her for over fifteen years. The
young girl's extreme reserve did not at
first discourage suitors, but at the end
of a few years they tired of their
quest.

One alone persisted with tender te-
nacity and deserved the name of "eter-
nal flame," a name he accepted with
melancholy resignation; that was M.
Robert Darzac. Mlle. Stangerson was
now no longer young, and it seemed
that, having found no reason for mar-
rying at five and thirty, she would never
find one.

Suddenly some weeks before the
events with which we are occupied a
report—to which nobody attached any
importance, so incredible did it sound
—was spread about Paris that Mlle.
Stangerson had at last consented to
"crown" the inextinguishable flame of
M. Robert Darzac! It needed that M.
Robert Darzac himself should not deny
this matrimonial rumor to give it an
appearance of truth, so unlikely did it
seem to be well founded. One day,
however, M. Stangerson, as he was
leaving the Academy of Science, an-
nounced that the marriage of his
daughter and M. Robert Darzac would
be celebrated in the privacy of the
Chateau du Glandier as soon as he and
his daughter had put the finishing
touches to their report summing up
their labors on the "Dissociation of
Matter." The new household would in-
stall itself in the Glandier, and the son-
in-law would lend his assistance in the
work to which the father and daughter
had dedicated their lives.

The scientific world had barely had
time to recover from the effect of this
news when it learned of the attempted
assassination of mademoiselle.

CHAPTER V.

In which Joseph Rouletabille Makes
a Remark to M. Robert Darzac
Which Produces Its Little Effect.

ROULETABILLE and I had been
walking for several minutes by
the side of a long wall bound-
ing the vast property of M.
Stangerson and had already come
within sight of the entrance gate when
our attention was drawn to an indi-
vidual who, half bent to the ground,
seemed to be so completely absorbed
in what he was doing as not to have
seen us coming toward him. At one
time he stooped so low as almost to
touch the ground. At another he drew
himself up and attentively examined
the wall. Then he looked into the
palm of one of his hands and walked
away with rapid strides. Finally he
set off running, still looking into the
palm of his hand; Rouletabille had
brought me to a standstill by a ges-
ture.

"Hush! Frederic Larsan is at work!
Don't let us disturb him!"

Rouletabille had a great admiration
for the celebrated detective. I had
never before seen him, but I knew him
well by reputation. At that time, be-
fore Rouletabille had given proof of
his unique talent, Larsan was reputed
as the most skillful unraveler of the
most mysterious and complicated
crimes. His reputation was world-
wide, and the police of London and
even of America often called him
to their aid when their own national
inspectors and detectives found them-
selves at the end of their wits and re-
sources.

No one was astonished, then, that
the head of the Paris police had at
the outset of the mystery of the yel-
low room telegraphed his precious
subordinate in London, where he had
been sent on a big case of stolen se-
curities, to return with all haste. Fre-
deric had made all speed, doubtless
knowing by experience that if he was
interrupted in what he was doing it
was because his services were urgent-
ly needed in another direction, so, as
Rouletabille said, he was that morning
already "at work." We soon found

out in what it consisted.

What he was continually looking at
in the palm of his right hand was
nothing but his watch, the minute
hand of which he appeared to be not-
ing intently. Then he turned back,
still running, stopping only when he
reached the park gate, where he again
consulted his watch and then put it
away in his pocket, shrugging his
shoulders with a gesture of discoura-
gement. He pushed open the park gate,
relocked and locked it, raised his head
and through the bars perceived us.
Rouletabille rushed after him, and I
followed. Frederic Larsan waited for
us.

"M. Fred," said Rouletabille, raising
his hat and showing the profound
respect, based on admiration, which
the young reporter felt for the cele-
brated detective, "can you tell me
whether M. Robert Darzac is at the
chateau at this moment? Here is one
of his friends of the Paris bar, who
desires to speak with him."

"I really don't know, M. Rouleta-
bille," replied Fred, shaking hands
with my friend, whom he had several
times met in the course of his difficult
investigations. "I have not seen him."

"The concierges will be able to in-
form us, no doubt," said Rouletabille,
pointing to the lodge, the door and
windows of which were close shut.

"The concierges will not be able to
give you any information, M. Rouleta-
bille."

"Why not?"

"Because they were arrested half an
hour ago."

"Arrested?" cried Rouletabille. "Then
they are the murderers?"

Frederic Larsan shrugged his shoul-
ders.

"When you can't arrest the real mur-
derer," he said, with an air of supreme
irony, "you can always indulge in the
luxury of discovering accomplices."

"Did you have them arrested, M.
Fred?"

"Not I! I haven't had them arrest-
ed. In the first place, I am pretty
sure that they have not had anything
to do with the affair and then be-
cause—"

"Because of what?" asked Rouleta-
bille eagerly.

"Because of nothing," said Larsan,
shaking his head.

"Because there were no accom-
plices!" said Rouletabille.

"Ah! You have an idea, then, about
this matter?" said Larsan, looking at
Rouletabille intently. "Yet you have
seen nothing, young man—you have
not yet gained admission here!"

"I shall get admission."

"I doubt it. The orders are strict."

"I shall gain admission if you let
me see M. Robert Darzac. Do that
for me. You know we are old friends.
I beg of you, M. Fred. Do you re-
member the article I wrote about you
on the gold bar case?"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—A mysterious at-
tempt is made at midnight to murder
Mlle. Stangerson, daughter and
assistant of Prof. Stangerson, who is
at work on his theory of the dissoci-
ation of matter in a pavilion near his
chateau. Pistol shots and the young
woman's cries for help are heard
behind the locked and bolted door of
her chamber, the yellow room. The
cries are answered by Professor Stan-
gerson and Daddy Jacques, an aged
servant. Aided by the concierges,
Bernier and his wife, they break open
the door and find Mlle. Stangerson
swooning and half strangled, with a
wound in her temple, but find no
trace of her assailant. The only
possible outlet from the yellow room
is the door. The weird cry of the
"bete du bon Dieu," a cat belonging
to Mother Angenoux, a recluse, is
heard just before Mlle. Stangerson's
cries. II—Joseph Rouletabille, a re-
porter-detective, is introduced to the
reader by M. Sainclair, the narrator
of the story. Rouletabille declares
the revolver was fired by Mlle. Stan-
gerson, wounding her assailant in the
hand